

Ephesians 1:3-14
January 3, 2010

Hampton Baptist
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Baptism and First Communion: Abby Barefoot and Emelia Goetzke

“All by Yourself”

Dear Abby and Emelia,

The Apostle Paul wrote letters to churches and to special people; many of those letters are included in our New Testament. What I read a moment ago was addressed to a group of people who lived in Ephesus and was probably shared with other people in that area.

Just as Paul wrote letters to people and churches, I am writing to you about this special day and what it means.

Once a year, I offer a class for children who are interested in *becoming* Christians or for those who have already made that important decision. Both of you attended that class back in the fall. In the class, I asked questions about the difference between *becoming* a Christian and *being* a Christian. In the first class, we played “Charles Says” (like Simon Says) and talked about following my instructions and how that someone who is a Christian will follow Jesus’ instructions.

In the second class, I asked everyone to remove their shoes; I asked you to close your eyes while I put a shoe behind my back and then you guessed whose shoe I was hiding. I then placed the “secret” shoes in front of you and asked you to put them on your feet; another person’s shoes don’t always fit. I talked about what a unique and individual decision it is to *become* a Christian and asked numerous questions trying to make the point of what *makes* a person a Christian. Reading the Bible, or doing good deeds, or being friendly, or even being baptized does not *make* a person a Christian. The only way someone can *become* a Christian is to ask Jesus to come into her heart.

On the chalkboard, I wrote a math formula: God’s grace + our belief (or faith) = salvation. God’s grace is always first. Paul was deliberate in the passage I read from Ephesians in discussing the wonderful grace of God. We can have an opportunity to believe because of God’s grace. God has already done the work in giving us Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. Now, all we have to do is believe, to trust, to have faith that God has already done it.

Girls, today is a day of blessing for you. Your baptisms and your first communions indicate that you are now a Christian, and because of that decision, each of you will be blessed with eternal life. The verses I read from Ephesians describe the spiritual blessings we *all* have; Paul lists seven blessings. God chose us long before we were even born (v.4). God wants us to be God’s children (v.5). God will forgive us of our sins (v.7) God’s purpose in creating us was for us to know God (v.9). God works things out so we can know God (v.11). Because of God, we can have hope (v.12). We can know the presence of the Holy Spirit which proves that God is always with us (v.13). While both of you are being blessed with a lot of attention today, the verses from Ephesians remind us that we are *all* blessed.

At the conclusion of our second class, I dismissed the other children and learned that the Bell Choir was still rehearsing; your moms were still ringing bells upstairs. I told you to reenter the classroom, and that we would wait. Abby, you went to the chalkboard and began to draw. When you completed your picture, you said, “Do you know what this is? This is a picture of my baptism-this is me, and this is you.”

I said, “Abby, you know that baptism is what comes *after* you have asked Jesus to come into your heart. In our class next week, I will be talking about baptism and communion.”

In a very serious tone, you said, “I think I am finally ready to make that big step.”

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I said, "Well first, you need to ask Jesus to come into your heart."

You replied, "Oh, I've already done that. At night, when my Daddy is working, my Mom helps Emma first, because you know she's younger. So I get in my bed, and I say, "Thank you, God, for everything; forgive me when I make bad choices; the people that are sick, please make them better. And please keep Daddy safe at work. Amen." And one night, I decided to ask Jesus to come into my heart, so I said, "Jesus, I want you to come into my heart." And when I did, I had this tickle feeling right here in my chest, and I felt good all over."

I was so excited, so I exclaimed, "Abby, guess what? When you asked Jesus to come into your heart, Jesus did just that. From now on, Jesus will always be in your heart! And when you die, which we hope is a long time from now, you will go to heaven. Abby, you are a Christian!"

Emelia, you were listening to my conversation with Abby. After I had hugged Abby, you said, "I've already asked Jesus to come into my heart too."

I asked you to sit in the floor with me and to tell me about it.

With excitement you said, "You know my cousin Evelyn? She's in college. One day in the kitchen, she said, "Emelia, it's very easy to become a Christian. You say a prayer to God, and then ask Jesus to come into your heart. Would you like to do that?" I said yes, so Evelyn prayed first and then I prayed. And when I said "Amen," I had this tingling feeling go down my back and felt like I was a Christian."

I couldn't believe my ears! So I said, "Emelia, when you asked Jesus to come into your heart, Jesus did just that. From now on, Jesus will always be in your heart! And when you die, which we hope is a long time from now, you will go to heaven. Emelia, you are a Christian too!" And then we all hugged each other.

A few minutes later, I heard the Bell Choir coming down the steps; I told Alystra and Lynne that the girls wanted to tell them something. Abby and Emelia's eyes sparkled as they told their mothers how they had become Christians, and then Lynne and Alystra's eyes filled with tears of joy.

While I thought that one day, I would meet with each of you individually *after* the class was over and talk to you personally about asking Jesus to come into your heart, you did this all by yourself. You didn't need anyone to pray this prayer for you; you didn't need a preacher standing there beside you. You didn't have to be urged to obey a parent's command to accept Jesus as your Savior. Both of you, on your own timetable, made this all-important decision all by yourself.

Making a personal decision to be one of Jesus' disciples was *your* decision, not anyone else's. While your choice to *become* a Christian made many people happy, that was not the reason that you did it. Making someone else *feel* good is not why anyone should become a Christian. Instead, you are important enough to God to have your *own* relationship with God. The service today has been designed for you to communicate with these gathered friends and family what is important to you. Through the Litany of Baptism *and* your baptism you have declared your commitment to Jesus to be one of his disciples; during your First Communion, you will show your commitment to Jesus through servant discipleship.

Your baptism tells the story that you have become a Christian. When we receive the bread and the cup, we are celebrating the great love of Jesus Christ and remembering his death on the cross. But there is a difference between *becoming* and *being* a Christian. *Being* a Christian is when we *act* like Jesus; that is called discipleship. As Jesus' disciples, we are all called to serve one another. Just as you made the decision to *become* a Christian all by yourself, you also are called to make the daily decision to *be* a Christian.

I am very excited that you made the decision to become a Christian on your own; that shows

me that you understand what you were doing. I pray that you will continue to make the decision to *be* a Christian, to act like Jesus, all by yourself.

Love,

Charles

Ephesians 1:3-14 (New Century Version)

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ, God has given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly world. 4 That is, in Christ, he chose us before the world was made so that we would be his holy people -- people without blame before him. 5 Because of his love, God had already decided to make us his own children through Jesus Christ. That was what he wanted and what pleased him, 6 and it brings praise to God because of his wonderful grace. God gave that grace to us freely, in Christ, the One he loves. 7 In Christ we are set free by the blood of his death, and so we have forgiveness of sins. How rich is God's grace, 8 which he has given to us so fully and freely. God, with full wisdom and understanding, 9 let us know his secret purpose. This was what God wanted, and he planned to do it through Christ. 10 His goal was to carry out his plan, when the right time came, that all things in heaven and on earth would be joined together in Christ as the head. 11 In Christ we were chosen to be God's people, because from the very beginning God had decided this in keeping with his plan. And he is the One who makes everything agree with what he decides and wants. 12 We are the first people who hoped in Christ, and we were chosen so that we would bring praise to God's glory. 13 So it is with you. When you heard the true teaching -- the Good News about your salvation -- you believed in Christ. And in Christ, God put his special mark of ownership on you by giving you the Holy Spirit that he had promised. 14 That Holy Spirit is the guarantee that we will receive what God promised for his people until God gives full freedom to those who are his -- to bring praise to God's glory.